NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER 5-6328
WAYNE COREY/HONG KONG

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CHINA'S WALL POSTERS

ANNCR:

THE CURRENT WALL POSTER CAMPAIGN IN PEKING ILLUSTRATES THE UNIQUE WAY IN WHICH OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE OPINIONS ARE COMMUNICATED IN CHINA. HERE IS A BACKGROUND REPORT FROM WAYNE COREY IN HONG KONG.

VOICE:

HUNDREDS OF YEARS AGO THE PREDECESSORS OF TODAY'S WALL POSTERS WERE IMPERIAL DECREES POSTED IN PUBLIC PLACES IN CHINA TO INFORM THE LARGEST POSSIBLE NUMBER OF PEOPLE. BUT EVEN WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEWSPAPERS, RADIO AND TELEVISION, WALL POSTERS REMAIN AN HONORABLE CHINESE TRADITION. THE CHINESE COMMUNISTS USED THEM DURING THE CIVIL WAR TO CREATE POPULAR RESENTMENT AGAINST THE KUOMINTANG. WALL POSTERS WERE WIDELY USED AGAIN DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN CHINA IN THE NINETEEN SIXTIES BY MAO TSE-TUNG'S RED GUARDS. THEY ACCUSED THE NOW-REHABILITATED SENIOR VICE PREMIER, TENG HSIAO-PING, AND MANY OTHER COMMUNIST PARTY OFFICIALS OF BEING CAPITALIST-ROADERS.

THE LATEST WALL POSTERS HAVE BEEN ON DISPLAY SINCE LAST MONTH UNDER THE GENERALLY BENIGN GAZE OF VICE PREMIER TENG, AND IT IS THE LEADERS OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION WHO ARE NOW CRITICIZED INCLUDING THE LATE CHAIRMAN MAO.

WHAT IS A CHINESE WALL POSTER? IT'S A LONG BANNER WITH A POLITICAL COMPLAINT OR PERSONAL GRIEVANCE WRITTEN IN LARGE CHINESE CHARACTERS, OR IT MAY BE A SIMPLE AND BRIEF LETTER. INDIVIDUALS PUT UP WALL POSTERS EARLY IN THE MORNING OR LATE AT NIGHT. IN THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN, THEY APPEAR MOSTLY ON THE SO-CALLED DEMOCRACY

WALL AT THE INTERSECTION OF TWO MAIN STREETS IN PEKING. IT IS CALLED DEMOCRACY WALL BECAUSE MANY OF THE POSTERS HAVE CALLED FOR DEMOCRACY AND MORE FREEDOM. ONE POSTER THAT CONSISTED OF AN OPEN LETTER ASKING PRESIDENT CARTER TO FOCUS HIS ATTENTION ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN CHINA DID NOT STAY ON THE WALL VERY LONG.

ONCE POSTERS APPEAR THEY MAY BE DEBATED BY THE CROWDS THAT GATHER TO READ THEM. PEOPLE WILL OPENLY AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE MESSAGES AS THEY DID IN THE CASE OF THE OPEN LETTER DEALING WITH HUMAN RIGHTS. ONE VIEW WAS THAT HUMAN RIGHTS WAS SOMETHING TO BE DEBATED ONLY WITHIN THE HUGE CHINESE FAMILY.

FOR THOSE TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF WALL POSTERS IT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHETHER THEY ARE THE WORK OF INDIVIDUALS OR UNITS OF WORKERS OR SOLDIERS, FOR EXAMPLE, WHO MAY HAVE ACTED UNDER OFFICIAL DIRECTION. THE HIGH LEVEL TOLERANCE OF THE CURRENT WALL POSTER CAMPAIGN IN PEKING CLEARLY INDICATES OVERALL APPROVAL OF WHAT IS BEING ACHIEVED. ANALYSTS HERE IN HONG KONG SAY THE CAMPAIGN PROBABLY HAS TWO MAIN INTER-RELATED OBJECTIVES -- TO CRITICIZE THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND THE DOCTRINAIRE IDEOLOGY OF MAO TSE-TUNG AND TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO THINK NEW IDEAS SO THEY CAN HELP MOVE CHINA FORWARD IN A NEW ERA OF MODERNIZATION.

SOME ANALYSTS SEE AN ANALOGY BETWEEN THE CHINESE WALL POSTERS AND BANNERS THAT APPEAR DURING AMERICAN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS. BOTH ARE ESSENTIALLY POLITICAL TOOLS TO GUIDE THE PUBLIC ALONG A CERTAIN DIRECTION OF THOUGHT. BUT IN AMERICA WHAT IS USUALLY AT STAKE IS THE VICTORY OR DEFEAT OF ONE POLITICIAN. IN CHINA, WALL POSTERS PERIODICALLY STIR THE CHINESE DRAGON AND THEY MAY AFFECT THE BEHAVIOR OF ONE-THIRD OF MANKIND

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